

Stewardship Partners

Dear Ms. Stockwell and Ms. Waterman,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Phase I and II NPDES draft permits. Stewardship Partners is a Seattle-based 501(c)(3) organization. We create people-based solutions that engage Puget Sound communities as caretakers of the land and water that sustain us all. Stewardship Partners has been creating rain gardens and other stormwater BMPs in partnership with communities throughout the region for almost two decades.

I appreciate the updated structural stormwater controls (SSC) sections of both the phase I and II permits in terms of the clear intention to increase environmental justice, address priority toxics like 6PPD-quinone, and increase the pace of retrofitting our existing pollution-generating impervious surfaces. My comments are simply that on those three key points, this permit cycle should require more progress on all three.

On environmental justice, I believe this permit should provide an explicit definition of environmental justice using the language already created by the state Environmental Justice Taskforce in their 2020 final report. Specifically, the permit should re-state and strive to follow the five EJ principles therein: "1. Achieve the highest attainable environmental quality and health outcomes for all people. 2. Adopt a racial justice lens. 3. Engage community meaningfully. 4. Be transparent. 5. Be accountable." And municipal permittees should be required to describe how their SSC/retrofit investments follow these principles.

On priority toxics and specifically 6PPD-quinone, I believe this permit should prioritize bioretention-based green infrastructure retrofits that are proven to reverse toxicity of highway runoff for aquatic life, especially Coho salmon. The highest priority (most points) should be retrofitting high pollutant load surfaces (e.g. high traffic roads) with bioretention-based green infrastructure.

On the pace of retrofits, I believe the current draft of this permit will not accelerate retrofits enough to meet the challenge. Stormwater is the single largest source of water pollution in our region. With dozens of proven effective retrofit strategies, the Clean Water Act, tribal treaty-protected rights as well as the rights of future generations all clearly demand more investment, not a gradual phasing in. Puget Sound is suffering death by a thousand cuts (thousands of outfalls) and it's hard to justify only applying one Band-Aid a year when it's feasible to do much more.

Thank you for considering these comments and for the important work you do to protect these waters and the communities that belong to them.

Sincerely,

Aaron D. Clark Ph.D.
Director of Strategic Partnerships



Stewardship Partners

Abbey Stockwell - Municipal Stormwater Senior Planner
Amy Waterman - Municipal Stormwater Senior Planner
Washington State Department of Ecology
300 Desmond Drive SE
Lacey, WA 98503

March 23, 2023

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